

To the committee members looking at student safety and mental health:

What better describes our job as school social workers than those three words: **safety and mental health.**

We are the first line of defense in recognizing children who are vulnerable, unhappy, uncomfortable, exposed.

I stand by the front door every morning and watch the faces of the students who enter, trying to distinguish who is coming with baggage that needs to be unloaded.

My office door is always open, as students funnel in and out with their troubles, concerns, arguments with other students, teachers, parents.

My phone is busy with calls from parents crying for help with how to reach their own children.

More often I can calm and advise the parent, assuage the child and work with the student to figure out strategies.

Sometimes, when I deem it more serious, and I refer them to an outside agency or doctor.

But for my 600 students, I am the first line of defense, they know I am on their side.

I tell my “kids” that my job is to ensure they are happy, safe and protected here at school.

Safety and mental health.

*Ruth Haendler, MSW*

*School Social Worker*

*Turn of River Middle School*